

SSA intends to use this information to support the sample selection for participants in the customer satisfaction survey. This will allow SSA to include the experiences and outcomes of a broad range of beneficiaries.

This project shall submit periodic reports (as described in Part IV, Section D, Management Information and Reporting) to SSA, OAG. Data and information that are used in preparing the reports can be used, for example, to improve the efficiency of the project's operations, use of staff, and linkages between the project and the programs for which benefits planning is needed to better meet the needs of target populations. In addition, the evaluation results will be disseminated to other projects to promote learning, program refinements, and facilitate partnership and achievement of project objectives. Timely comprehensive MI data also allows for cost accounting, which helps improve the efficiency of service approaches and may inform future policy decisions.

Part V. Application Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

A. Screening Requirements

All applications that meet the deadline will be screened to determine completeness and conformity to the requirements of this announcement. Complete and conforming applications will then be evaluated.

1. *Number of Copies:* The applicant must submit one original signed and dated application and a minimum of two copies. The submission of seven additional copies is optional and will expedite processing, but will not affect the evaluation or scoring of the application.

2. *Length:* The program narrative portion of the application (Part III of the SSA-96-BK) may not exceed 30 double-spaced pages (or 15 single-spaced pages) on one side of the paper only, using standard (8½" × 11") size paper, and 12-point font. Attachments that support the program narrative count towards the 30-page limit; resumes and letters of support do not count within the 30-page limit.

B. Evaluation Criteria

Applications that pass the screening process will be independently reviewed by at least three individuals, who will evaluate and score the applications based on the evaluation criteria. There are four categories of criteria used to score applications: Capability; relevance/adequacy of program design; resources and management; and quality assurance plan. The total points

possible for an application is 100, and sections are weighted as noted in the descriptions of criteria below.

Although the results from the independent panel reviews are the primary factor used in making funding decisions, they are not the sole basis for making awards. The Commissioner will consider other factors as well when making funding decisions. For instance, the need to assure the required geographic distribution of projects may take precedence over rankings/scores of the review panel.

Following are the evaluation criteria that SSA will use in reviewing all applications (relative weights are shown in parentheses):

1. Capability (20 points)

The applicant's capability to deliver benefits planning and assistance services will be judged by:

- Description of how entity will test for Benefits Specialist competencies listed in Part IV and provide any needed training to ensure competencies will be maintained and/or enhanced; (8 points)
- Description of the proposed administration and organization of the project, including the existence of the necessary administrative resources to effectively carry out the project; and (7 points)
- Project Director's and key staff's documentation of experience and results of past projects of this nature (extra consideration may be given to applicants based on the quality and extent of their experience in return-to-work efforts for SSDI and SSI beneficiaries with disabilities). (5 points)

2. Relevance/Adequacy of Project Design (30 points)

The adequacy of project design will be judged by:

- A description of the project operations, including how the project will work (e.g., identification and notification of potential project participants about availability of benefits planning and assistance services, location for providing services, ability to travel to beneficiary, etc.) and the quality of the project design; (6 points)
- A concise and clear statement of the project goals and objectives; MI data to be collected; specification of data sources; including how they will interact with the VCU data base; and how quality assurance will be realized; (5 points)
- A description of how the project will address provision of benefits planning, assistance, and outreach to

populations with special cultural or language requirements; (5 points)

- Evidence of collaboration with relevant agencies, including collocation within a DOL One-Stop Career Center organization, in providing benefits planning and assistance services; and extent and clarity of collaborative efforts with other organizations, including letters of intent or written assurances; (5 points)

- A description of how the project will address provision of benefits planning, assistance, and outreach to transition-to-work aged SSI youth; (4 points)

- Description of problems that may arise and how they will be resolved; e.g., how dropouts and inadequate numbers of participants will be handled; and (3 points)

- Evidence of how the proposed approach will accomplish Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach Program goals. (2 points)

3. Resources and Management (30 points)

Resources and management will be judged by:

- Appropriateness of qualifications of the project personnel, as evidenced by training and experience indicating that they have the skills required to competently provide benefits planning and assistance services, and outreach; (8 points)
- Evidence of successful previous experience related to benefits planning, assistance, and outreach program; (4 points)
- Evidence that the applicant has a working knowledge of work incentives and the various programs available to beneficiaries with disabilities; (4 points)
- Evidence of adequate facilities (e.g., collocation within a DOL One-Stop Career Center) and resources to deliver services; (4 points)
- Appropriateness of the case management and monitoring systems and techniques, including an MI system, quality assurance system, and a range of other monitoring and management options; (3 points)
- Extent and quality of project assurances that sufficient resources (including personnel, time, funds, and facilities) will be available to support services to beneficiaries; (3 points)
- Evidence that the applicant will meaningfully involve family members and other representatives of target groups, including advocates in the process of delivery services; and (2 points)
- Cost effectiveness, per client costs, and reasonableness of overall project